November 15 - December 16, 2000

Curated by
Sally Berger

Gregg Bordowitz
Jim Campbell
Magdalena Campos-Pons
Kyrina Cuesta
LaMara Eanes and Ugo Riemer
with David Le of Sound Portrait Productions
Christopher Sullivan

Apex Art Curatorial Program

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Something Happened

This exhibition reflects on the autobiographical, the personal, and self-portraiture across and through artist's mediums — in video, video installation, photography, animated film, spoken word and sound, written text, and electronics. The artists in the exhibition use life as material. Each has taken on the autobiographical as complexity, identity as multiplying, the personal as time and memory. It is popularly personified that increased technological manipulation of the image will render the real less ascertainable. The artists in this exhibition shift this concern through a fluidity of expression across methodologies and materials to arrive at a more experiential type of work.

Here the everyday, the particular, and the private experience — that which is generally unnoticed, unremarked, unspoken, takes precedent. The artists place themselves within the work through narrative, physicality and memory. After ego, fictional characters, symbols, camera movement, voice and body rhythms, mark the artist's presence. At some point the viewer/refractor steps inside and becomes the embodiment of the experience, part of the immediate, the urgent and the universal.

Something Happened

Performance artist and filmmaker Christopher Sullivan sees autobiographically-based, fictionalized episodic narratives in literary terms the roman a clef to evoke what he calls the "apperent displacement" of his childhood in Pittsburgh. Consuming Spirits, Part 1, a work-in-progress, interweaves two different visual worlds in film animation to describe memory and the present, and the tension between the inexplicable and the familiar. The silly landscape of industrial Pittsburgh, dotted with small horses and sounds that travel between locals, informs its sense of intimate scale, yet elevated space. The characters, law, and social service and government agencies in the story compels to create this hazy universe. The inspiration for Sullivan's film came from finding out family secrets late in life that rewrite his history.

Gregg Bordowitz was actively engaged in the AIDS awareness movement when at the age of 23 he discovered that he was HIV antibody positive. From that moment the most intimate detail of his life became his material. In the video clip Fast Trip Long Drop, 1993, he confronts his birth family's abandonment and compiles the onslaught of his own illness to the rash of devil acts of Evil Knievel. An alter ego (after Allman) heightens our awareness of and complicity in his plight. Bordowitz's subsequent texts more graphically depict the physical manifestations and emotional realities of every day life turned into a vigilance over one's own mortality. In "The Drug User", a short story written specifically for this exhibition, we experience Bordowitz's dilemma through Alexander Pittelman. This allegorical character expresses the desires and weaknesses of a sick man caught in the contradictions of our age.
Magdalena Campos-Pons’s work revolves around the strong ties to her African, Cuban, and American icons. Born in Cuba of African descent, she married and moved to America in 1990. Exile is inscribed in her experience and she uses portraiture to describe and to maintain aspects of her multicultural history and identity, to merge the cultural and the historical within a new present context. At the center of her work are the people she cares about.

Multiple forms (performance and sculpture) are combined with various materials (fabric, glass, video, natural elements) and symbols (stains, colors) in her multi-media installations and large format Polaroid photographs. The layers of form and meaning create what the artist describes as a “Third Space: a space between territory, between what is home, between languages, between media, between performance versus ritual, between three- and two-dimensional, between all these layers and what happens there in-between.”

Campos-Pons’s portrait photographs arranged in dicing/living compositions express this idea of an interstitial space – what happens “in-between?” – through performances and stillness. The triptych in the exhibition, Sagra Familia 2, features her nuclear family. A man, a child, a woman (husband, son, artist), stand with backs toward the camera in three separate but lined placed photographs. The figures form a unit, each of their backs and the eyes painted on them of different colors and hues that intertwine a dialogue of nurturing, protection, and vigilance over one another. Campos-Pons’s use of autobiogrophy and portraiture is a process that is not based on a fixed notion of identity, but on the idea that one should both mark the difference, and find the similarities.

Ximena Cuevas’s enigmatic video sketches reflect on passion, romance and the life of an artist in a larger context of contemporary Mexican culture. Her single-channel videos express the duality between inner and outer worlds. The interior self is reflected by the sense of unspoken secrets; the exterior is chaotic and contradictory. She says, “To live with the camera as part of my skin is one of the huge qualities of video. For the first time mankind has the small camera that understands you.” The claustrophobic video installation at Pauels, was inspired by a line from E. E. Cummings: “‘He is unknown.’ There is nothing to escape from and nothing to escape to.”

David Ivey specializes in a unique form of empathetic, non-rated sound portraits that draw an intimate connection between the subject and the audience. The company he founded, Sound Portrait Productions, is dedicated to creating videos that bring neglected American voices to a national arena. His focus is on the poets and the belief of the seemingly poetic, the forgotten, and the poor. He began recording oral histories, “probably because I felt like a loser as a kid and appreciate underdogs,” and “to shine a light on the hidden parts of American society.”

Ivey met Lallan Jones and Lloyd Newman while conducting research for a video documentary series on issues of race and ethnicity in Chicago (“Chicago Matters”). The two 13-year-old boys responded to his call for young people interested in telling their own stories. They were provided with tape recorders, microphones, and training which they used over a seven-day period in March of 1995. Their remarkable candid dury Ghetto Life ‘95 was the result. It begins with La Khan’s words, “Good morning. Day 1. Walking to school, leaving out the door... This is my walk everyday, so I’m taking you on a little journey through my life...” Intervenes with family, friends, and neighbors are recorded with incidental detail from the boys perspective. Editing and sound choices were made in collaboration with boy. Several years later when a tragic incident occurred in the housing projects, the boys decided with Ivey to investigate the reasons behind it. The boys spent a year interviewing for Remember the Asylum Stories of Old-More that was published as an informative and rare feature-length radio documentary.

Jim Campbell combines his knowledge of mathematics and electrical engineering with art to create electronic installations that involve video, media, and the computer and to reflect on time and memory. He uses the parallels between engineering (to solve problems) with those of art (to create problems) to his advantage. He moves between the technical and personal, the logical and intuitive when conceiving his work. Portrait of My Mother, and Photo of My Mother most clearly represent how personal content cycles through his work. From Memory Works (1994 – 98), a series of non-narrative pieces, each work is based upon a digitally recorded memory of an event. Some of these electronics express personal memory and others a collective memory. Using some of the same tools for interactivity, but developing from Campbell’s other explorations in partici- 


2. “He’s a sweet, nice fellow, alone, the other figures in it, it’s merely projective. There is nothing to escape from, not nothing to escape to. One is a pumps alone” T.S. Eliot, “The Cocktail Party” (1922), Act 1, Sc. 1.